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# Michel raps policy on Central America

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WASHINGTON—House Minority Leader Robert Michel [R., Ill.] Monday criticized the administration's handling of its Central American policy and warned President Reagan that the American people are becoming worried that "they might have another Vietnam on their hands."

In an interview, Michel said he thought that what the United States is "currently" doing in Central America is "succeeding" but that "the perception is we want to do a whole lot more."

House Speaker Thomas O'Neill [D., Mass.] said he thinks Reagan's policy is "frightening the American people."

He told reporters he thinks the plan to send three naval battle groups to conduct exercises off the Central American coast is "awful, absolutely awful."

THE SPEAKER said the naval maneuvers not only frighten Americans but also frighten Central American countries.

"It's an unneeded show of strength," he said. "Unneeded shows of strength can cause you terrible problems."

Michel said he urged the President to assure the American public that Central America will not be another Vietnam and suggested that the White House has not done a very good job of educating the public about what it is trying to achieve in Central America.

"I want to underscore the point that we've got some work to do to get the American people on our side," Michel said. "You've got to sell your policy. We have fallen down on selling the policy."

Michel brought up the subject of Central America at a White House meeting with the President and his top aides. Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker [R., Tenn.] also was present.

MICHEL, WHO represents Peoria, said he showed Reagan a copy of a Peoria Journal Star front page that had a huge close-up picture of names from the Vietnam war memorial in Washington and the line: "A first step to more GI graves."

Inside, the lead editorial, headlined "Remember Vietnam," said: "We wish Reagan would get off this dangerous course and stop trying to solve with guns the problems growing out of centuries of social injustice."

"Simplistic reliance on weapons will get us nothing but thousands more names to put on another memorial stone in Washington," the editorial concluded. "And we'll have as much to show for it as we do in Vietnam."

Peoria, a central Illinois industrial city in the heart of rich farmland, is often used in Washington as a test for what people are thinking in "Middle America."

Michel said public concern was heightened by Reagan's announcement last week that the battle groups, which will include two aircraft carriers, would conduct exercises off Central America, and by reports that more CIA aid is planned for the anti-Sandinista guerrillas in Nicaragua.

"DO WE REALLY NEED that show of force?" Michel asked of the battle groups. "You don't need carriers to interdict arms unless there is something else you want to say."

"We have more of a problem selling our own people than we do sending a message to a potential adversary," Michel said, adding that he is afraid the President is "overplaying" his hand and "losing support in Congress and with the American people."

Asked how the President reacted to his remarks, Michel said: "He listened."

The two House leaders made their criticisms on the eve of the House debate on a bill that would cut off covert aid to the Nicaraguan rebels. The legislation would provide \$80 million in open aid to help friendly Central American countries intercept arms being shipped across their borders.

The vote is thought to be very close, and both sides think Reagan's recent moves could affect the outcome.

IN THE SENATE, Christopher Dodd [D., Conn.], a critic of Reagan's Central American policy, said the naval exercises by the battle groups and combined U.S.-Honduran military ground exercises planned for the Nicaraguan-Honduran border raise questions about the War Powers Resolution.

Dodd, a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, asked Sen. Charles Percy [R., Ill.], chairman of the committee, to arrange a meeting with Secretary of State George Shultz to discuss the situation.